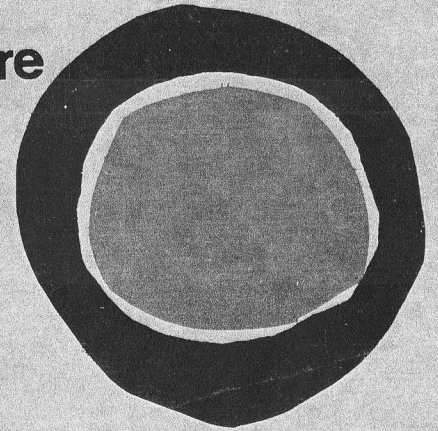


bread & puppet theatre

teatro campesino

san francisco mime troupe



RADICAL THEATRE FESTIVAL

SAN FRANCISCO STATE COLLEGE

SEPTEMBER 1968

A PUBLICATION OF
THE SAN FRANCISCO MIME TROUPE

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RADICAL THEATER FESTIVAL PROGRAM

Wednesday, September 25

Parade on campus: all participants

Commedia Style Workshop—R. G. Davis; Open Rehearsal—Bread and Puppet

Workers' Theater & the Socialist Movement—Luis Valdez

Sandra Archer of SFMT on TV panel

SFMT performance: Gorilla Marching Band, Puppet Shows, & commedia: "The Farce of Patelin"

Thursday, September 26

Berkeley Agit-Prop

Bread baking with Bread & Puppet

Music Workshop with El Teatro Campesino

Film: "Have You Heard of the San Francisco Mime Troupe?";

Mask-making with Bread and Puppet Theatre

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Friday, September 27

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Saturday, September 28

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Improvisations from Scenario workshop—Sandra Archer, R. G. Davis
Open Rehearsal—Bread & Puppet; Techniques of Folk Theater, El Teatro Campesino

Show: Parade: all three groups marching together with bands and singing of the National Anthem

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El Teatro Campesino: Actos; Teatro version of "A Man Says Goodbye to His Mother"

Bread & Puppet Theatre: "King's Story" and "A Man Says Goodbye to His Mother"

Sunday, September 29

Free show in Mission Dolores Park.

S. F. Mime Troupe: "Ruzzante, or The Veteran"

El Teatro Campesino: Actos

Bread & Puppet Theatre: Two crankies, "Rinaldini" and "Rats"

Gut Theatre: Skits from East Harlem

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In September of 1968, three groups who have struggled to create particular theatrical works relevant to their individual communities met at San Francisco State College. Their purpose was to identify what radical theater means. This publication is a record of that meeting.

My own association with Peter Schumann and Luis Valdez goes back many years. I can remember bringing an apricot spread and a loaf of bread (!) from the delicatessen on 2nd Avenue to Peter Schumann's house on 6th Street. I can remember seeing a tough looking but smiling chunky guy on the San Jose campus after we had done a street performance of *Tartuffe* — Luis Valdez. And I can remember him on stage talking about the grape strike.

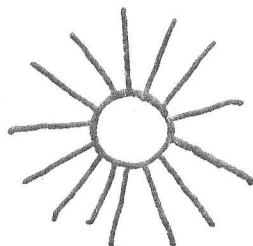
We have begun to share ideas, even personnel, but we work in three different styles. In theatrical historical time, our friendship has only begun; in immediate speed U.S. political time, we have known each other for a long time — 4 to 5 years. Yet we are not "professional" in that we do not wish to end up on Broadway or commercial TV or on film. Our work springs from community and from ideological commitment.

A measure of the vitality of each of these groups is their success in inducing people to join them, and inducing others to establish their own groups, thereby increasing radical cultural activity in this country.

The festival at San Francisco State, sponsored by the Associated students, was not an attempt to mass together a large number of radical groups — only a few performed. The four day event was not only intended to present three strong theatrical views of contemporary life but also to increase understanding among the groups so that we may all grow together.

R. G. Davis

HISTORIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS



I. THE BREAD AND PUPPET THEATER

The Bread and Puppet Theater was created in 1960-61 by Peter Schumann, who arrived in New York from his native Germany in 1960 with the hope of forming a dance company and stayed to establish what has become a unique and continuous evolving phenomenon. His theater combines dance, sculpture, puppetry, film, music, myth and ritual.

Schumann began to explore the possibilities of introducing "large sculptured bodies" into dance performances while directing at the America House in Munich in 1959. These experiments, plus dialogue and music, form the basis for the current style of the Bread and Puppet Theater—which blends the grace and economy of dance with the directness and simplicity of Punch and Judy.

A puppet is seldom created for a specific role: rather, the plastic possibilities of the figures themselves suggest characters and situations and define movements. These moving sculptures usually have heads and hands of papier mache over a framework of coat-hanger wire covered by rough cloth. Some are small and operable by one person; some are twelve feet high and require several operators.

Between 1961 and 1963, the company performed in the tradition of the wandering troupes of medieval Europe, putting on a show wherever there was an audience. In late 1963, the itinerant company found a home on Delancey street in New York and performed puppet, mask and mime productions there while preparing pageants, parades and other shows for the streets.

Since that time, the group has performed with community projects, conducted workshops and produced anti-war banners, puppets and newspapers. In the summer of 1967, the company left New York for the first time, and in 1968 performed in four European countries.

At the Radical Theater Festival, Bread and Puppet Theater performed "A Man Says Goodbye to His Mother", "The First King Play", and "Reiteration" and led workshops in puppet-making and bread-baking.

The Bread and Puppet Theater is a continuous workshop in sculpture, painting, mime, dance, story-making, puppet-building and operation, music and instrument-making. Participation varies with productions, from 1 to 100 actors, mimes, musicians, puppeteers. Children often take part in the productions, especially in "The Christmas Story," "The Crucifixion" and "Chicken Little."

CHRONOLOGY

- 1961 1st U. S. production of "Totentanz" at Judson Memorial church, New York City
- 1962-63 Performances at Putney School, Vermont; traveling performances given at Bennington, Harvard, Marlboro and other colleges and at Living Theater and Judson Gallery, New York City
- 1963-66 Establishment of Bread and Puppet Museum on Delancey street, New York; 40 seats—numerous puppet, mask and mime productions; improvisational shows, sidewalk shows, pageants, parades, political and anti-war shows. Construction of 10-12 foot puppets.
- 1962-67 Easter play and Christmas story (for 5 seasons) in New York churches
- 1965 Community project in East Harlem sponsored by Spanish Catholic Action (summer)
- 1966 Community projects in South Bronx and Central Harlem, sponsored by New York parks department and the council for parks and playgrounds. Construction of "Chicken Little" puppets.
- 1966-67 Weekly children's workshops, experimental plays and music sessions in space provided by New York Shakespeare company in old Astor building.
- 1967 Performances at Newport Folk Festival and Expo '67, Montreal. Numerous slapstick and anti-war plays for community groups in the New York area (summer)
- 1967 Touring to Eastern colleges (including Bennington, Goddard, Mount Holyoke, Duke, University of North Carolina, Wesleyan) and National Educational Television films three plays (autumn)
- 1967 Workshops in space provided by St. Mark's Projects on Old Courthouse in New York; production of woodcut anti-war banners, papier mache doll puppets, anti-war newspapers
- 1968 First European tour; performances in France, Germany, Holland and England (spring)
- 1968 Newport Folk Festival and work project in Maine (summer); Radical Theater Festival, San Francisco (fall)



II. EL TEATRO CAMPESINO

El Teatro Campesino, the Farm Workers' Theater, was conceived in a shack in Delano, California in November, 1965 by Luis Valdez and members of the National Farm Workers Association to dramatize the issues of the Delano grape strike and urge farm workers to join the union. El Teatro has since become a bilingual theater company which not only teaches and organizes Chicano workers but also enhances the Mexican-Americans' pride in their cultural and ethnic heritage.

Valdez has characterized his group as "somewhere between Brecht and Cantinflas." "Chicano Agit-prop" might be more direct. With minimal props (pruning shears, dark glasses, a wine bottle) and dressed as farm laborers, the actors present ten to fifteen minute "actos" representing the Chicano farm workers' plight. Gestures are broad, songs supplement the action and humor, satirical and farcical, is the essential ingredient. The Teatro's form is reminiscent of *commedia dell'arte*, but instead of Arlecchino, Pantalone and Brighella, the stock characters are Esquirole (scab), Contratista (labor contractor), Patroncito (grower) and Huelgista (striker)—all identified by signs around the actors' necks.

For two years, El Teatro played in fields and labor camps, at union meetings and strike benefits in the west and southwest. In 1966, the company joined NFWA members on their pilgrimage from Delano to Sacramento in an attempt to reach workers in the San Joaquin valley. A national tour in 1967 gave El Teatro a chance to dramatize la causa for urban sympathizers at universities, union halls and civic auditoriums across the country.

The company's most recent production, "The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa" dramatizes the disorientation of a Mexican-American family in lower-middle class urban life.

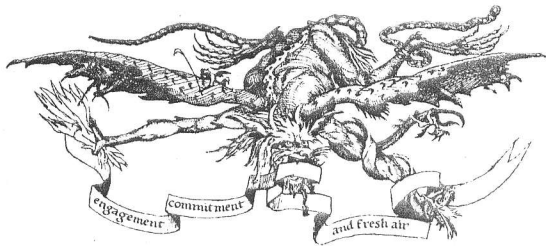
In September, 1967 El Teatro left Delano and the union to establish El Centro Campesino Cultural in Del Rey, California. This project is designed to expand El Teatro's basic purpose: overcoming the cultural as well as the economic oppression of the Chicano community.

El Teatro Campesino does not measure its success in awards and critical acclaim. "We shouldn't be judged as a theater," says Luis Valdez. "We're really part of a cause. We will consider our job done when every one of our people has regained his sense of personal dignity and pride in his history, his culture and his race."

CHRONOLOGY

El Teatro Campesino

Nov., 1965	El Teatro Campesino founded in conjunction with the National Farm Workers Association
March and April, 1966	Accompanied pilgrimage from Delano to Sacramento, California, with National Farm Workers Assn.
May, 1966	First urban performances at Committee Theater, San Francisco
June-Aug., 1967	National tour, including the Village Theater, New York, Newport Folk Festival and the Senate Committee on Migratory Labor, Washington D. C.
Sept., 1967	Establishment of El Centro Campesino Cultural, a farm workers' cultural center, Del Rey, California
March, 1968	Awarded "Obie" for "creating a workers' theater to demonstrate the politics of survival"
Aug., 1968	"The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa", a full-length play by Luis Valdez, produced in conjunction with the Radical Theater Festival



III. THE SAN FRANCISCO MIME TROUPE

The San Francisco Mime Troupe is an independent professional company founded in 1959 with the intention of offering an alternative to commercial and subsidized American theater.

We started out doing silent mime (in the line of Chaplin and Keaton rather than that of Marceau) with the idea of restoring movement to a stage immobilized by decades of tedious realism. We broke into noise, and then speech, when we found that silence promoted an atmosphere of sanctity, another acute illness of the theater. We now do plays, but mime is still the point of departure for our style, which is revolutionary precisely in that it is a style—designed not to be lifelike: the ideal that accounts for the amorphous flatness of most “modern” theater—but to be bigger than life.

By 1962 we had discovered that it was necessary to abolish the walls that separate the stage from life and the box office that separates it from most people. We went into San Francisco parks with a portable stage and performed our first commedia dell'arte play, passing the hat afterward. Commedia (broad comedy played by standard characters in masks, with heightened movement and frequent improvisation) combines style with spontaneity: qualities rarely seen together in the theater. We regard comedy as ultimately more serious than either tragedy or realism, because only comedy can propose alternatives to the actuality it examines.

We have done new commedias (generally, adaptations by us of classical plays) each year since we started, using the winters to explore other forms. Our black and white minstrel show toured the U. S. and Canada in 1965-66; commedia satires have toured the country in 1967 and 1968.

In 1962, we did two park performances. In 1968, we performed commedias five times a week from April through September. We now have a marching band and puppet shows to bring wonder to our streets and are writing a pageant play—a first experiment with another major outdoor form. We have performed in parks, on campuses, at county fairs; enough to be convinced that there is an audience everywhere—everyone is the audience—for living theater that speaks to real concerns; the growth of street theaters around the country confirms us in our direction.

We are committed to change, not to Art. We have tried to cut through the aristocratic and square notion of what theater is, and risk our egos to keep the search open for better ways of making the theater, in content and in style, a living radical force.

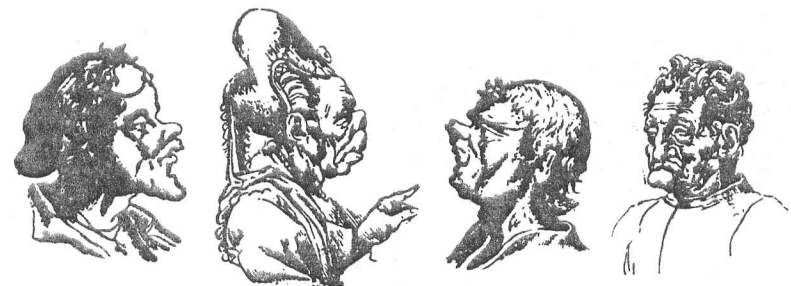
- 1959 11th Hour Mime Shows under auspices of the Actors Workshop
- 1960 Beckett's "Act Without Words" and other mimes
- 1961 "The Dowry"—our first commedia dell'arte play, a composite of Moliere's "Scapin", Goldoni's "The Servant of Two Masters" and scenes developed by the cast in improvisation. Our commedias retain the portable platform and backdrop and masks of the Italian Renaissance shows.
- 1962 "The Dowry" goes outdoors for two park performances
- 1963 "The Root", commedia, 14 park performances
"Ubu Roi", designed by William Wiley and using filmed sequences
- 1964 "Tartuffe", commedia
New film series, introducing Conner, Brakhage, and Genet's "Un Chant D'Amour" to the west coast
- 1965 Brecht's "Exception and the Rule" performed with a talk on Vietnam by Robert Scheer
R. G. Davis arrested while performing the commedia "Il Candelaio" in the park. The Recreation and Park commission had refused a permit on the grounds of "vulgar" material in the script; the ACLU appealed the action and the commission's refusal was ruled an unconstitutional attempt at censorship
DeGhelderode's "Chronicles of Hell" with poets Lawrence Ferlinghetti, David Meltzer and Lew Welch
"A Minstrel Show, or Civil Rights in a Cracker Barrel", an original work by Saul Landau and R. G. Davis opens in San Francisco, plays theaters and colleges in the Bay Area, and tours the Northwest—returning to San Francisco in 1966
- 1966 "Centerman", an original play by Peter Berg, opens at a teach-in at San Francisco State College
"Search and Seizure", written around cast improvisations, opens at a benefit for Dr. Timothy Leary and plays as a cabaret-theater piece
A series of children's puppet plays
"Output You" an original play by Peter Berg plays cabaret theaters in the Bay Area
"The Miser" and "Olive Pits", commedia satires, play two months in the parks
- 1967 "The Condemned", an adaptation for Brechtian presentation of Sartre's "Condemned of Altona"
"A Minstrel Show" begins Canadian tour, but the Mime Troupe is mistaken for another group and three members are jailed in Calgary, Alberta
"Vaudeville Show", a vaudeville show
"L'Amant Militaire", commedia anti-war satire, and "Olive Pits" play May to September in the parks, tour 25 U. S. campuses and fill houses for two weeks in New York
- 1968 Awarded "Obie" for "combining theater and revolution and grooving in the parks"
Two new commedias, "Ruzzante, or The Veteran" and "The Farce of Patelin" play weekdays and weekends, April to September in the parks
Street puppet shows
The Gorilla Marching Band steps out

IV. TWO OTHER GROUPS WE KNOW ABOUT

The Gut Theater began performing in May, 1968 under the direction of Enrique Vargas. The group, mainly Puerto Rican-Americans of East Harlem, presents broad, slapstick sketches dealing with life and death in the ghetto—landlords, cops, drugs, community agencies—as well as with broader issues. It also directs the Gut Theater Social Club as an alternative to the community centers operated by the welfare department.

Current Director is Edmundo Faccini from Puerto Rico who stresses his group's importance as an educating and organizing device within the Puerto Rican community. "Our actors are articulating aggressions and educating themselves rather than shooting cops or sitting in jail." In agit-prop tradition, skits are short and simple with no scripts or scenery; costumes and props are kept to a minimum. One reason for the simplicity is to encourage plagiarism, Faccini says: "Anyone can do what we are doing. Someone sees a simple show and says, 'Wow, I could do that' and he does it."

Berkeley Agit-Prop Theater, Inc. is an amorphous affinity group of young radicals, it says, many of them college students. Formed in 1966 as an offshoot of Berkeley SDS, Berkeley Agit-Prop has performed at political events, on street corners, on campuses and over the radio. It deals with issues and events as they arise, drawing characters and situations from any appropriate source—Melville, Thurber or Mother Goose—adds outrageous props and songs, and performs with humor and commitment.



INTRODUCTION TO THE PANEL

[On the third day of the festival, directors of the three troupes sat down to talk publicly. An abbreviated version of this discussion follows. Juris Svendsen, who led the panelists, writes:

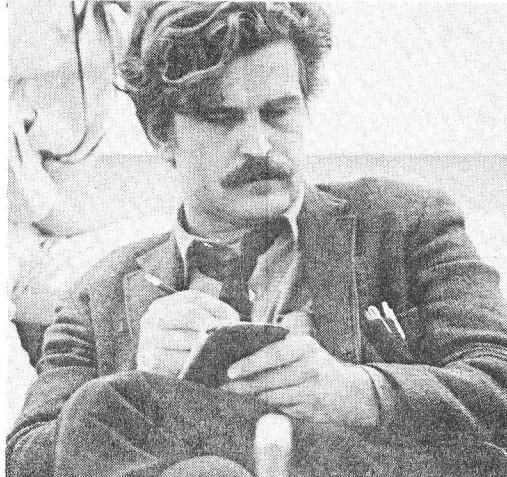
"Having known R. G. Davis and Luis Valdez for some time, and having made a pleasant, friendly and intense acquaintance with Peter Schumann three days prior to this panel discussion, I had to find a way to bring these highly creative, volatile, politically argumentative minds into fruitful discussion—one in which petty differences were minimized and critical, revelatory observations maximized. I did not fear the usual petty bickering to be found among professionals—be they artists or revolutionaries. Before the panel began, I told the participants I would ask the following questions:

1. How do you see the work of the other groups?
2. How do you want to be seen?
3. Where do you go from here?

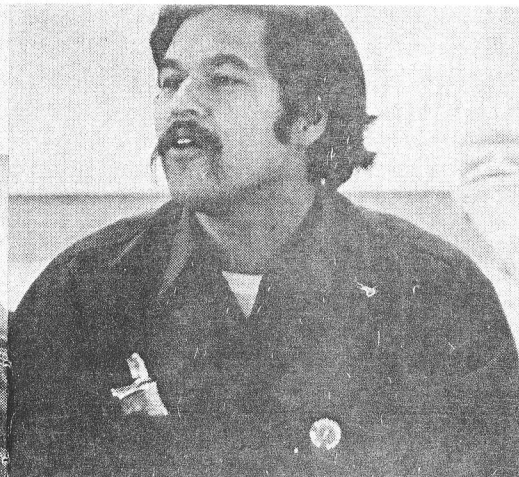
The results follow."]



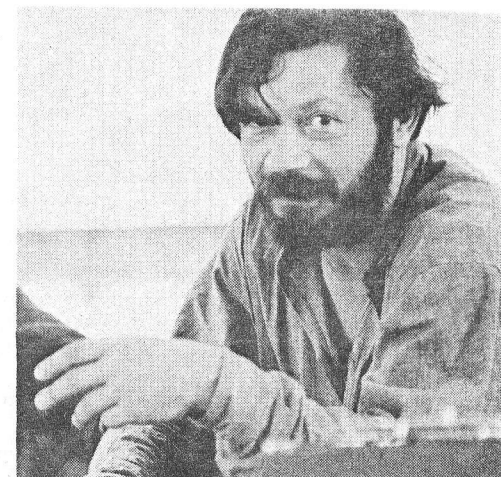
R. G. Davis



Juris Svendsen



Luis Valdez



Peter Schumann

THE PANEL DISCUSSION

DAVIS: What is the base of this Radical Theater Festival? It seems to me when you establish one, you can establish two and then you can get three. One, two, three Vietnams. One, two, three, many radical theaters, hopefully. The life of one theater is really dependent on the life of other theaters.

Harold Clurman once said that the Group Theater (probably the most significant theater in the U. S. for many, many years) died because they were the only group around. They were 20 people involved in radical or political theater, but they had no where to go, no one to talk to and they died.

Well, it's been my conception of the life of the Mime Troupe, as well as the life of everybody else, that the only way we can survive is to support other people. That is, we become part of the movement and the movement becomes a part of us—but we also support the other radical theaters.

A long time ago I suggested that anybody who left the Mime Troupe should work with the other radical theaters and, in the same way, anybody who leaves the other radical theaters, because of personality problems, or tired or such, should come work with us, so there's an interchange and not the competition that goes, "well, we don't like your work because so and so said..." We have differences about what we do, but I don't think we have any differences about what we want to see happen: the personalities are radical, the activity is radical and the content is radical. I think we are all in one way or another opposed to the plastic world of the U. S., the whole middle class monstrosity.

By bringing these three groups together, we establish the existence of a movement, we make a statement, a kind of camaraderie as well as a kind of conversation. But we should not be like superduper friends who do not see differences and do not criticize each other in some very appropriate ways.

When the Mime Troupe shows "Patelin" for instance, we do a "cranky" which we have taken lock, stock and barrel—not the design, but the basic idea—from Peter Schumann's theater. And I think the Teatro Campesino's "actos" have come from a knowledge of commedia; in part.

That kind of exchange is very beautiful. When the Mime Troupe gets into a situation where we need to do something very quick and agitational, we certainly can do it in an "acto" style.

I don't think you will find the images Peter Schumann brings to the theater

any place in the U. S. What he brings is Brechtian, very European, medieval images, very strong, beautiful, sculptured images. Nobody makes masks for the stage as well as he does, very strong, very powerful; he knows what to do with the face.

But he's a sculptor, not necessarily a director. After last night's performance, he said it was an anti-show; the Mime Troupe does a show-show. We do trip, trip, trip, and they do an anti-show. In other words, he doesn't perform at all. You can do that if you are Peter Schumann. If you are not Peter Schumann, you have to learn how.

No matter what you do in any one of the three companies, you have to find out who you are. There's no bullshit about it. You cannot get up on stage and perform commedia in a real way unless you know who you are first. You cannot get up in Teatro and play Mexican-American farmworker: either you are or you aren't. It's obvious to everyone. Either you are for the chicano operation or for la raza or whatever, and you know it—or it shows. And so too with Bread and Puppet—you can see that the people who are not there are not there.

Let's say I decided to buy a puppet show from Mr. Schumann. I give him \$200, that means \$50 a week for his family for a month. We do it. We buy the whole image. Could we do it? Could the Mime Troupe do it? I think we could, but we'd have to learn to do exactly as he's done: present people on the stage in a very real out front way. And they must believe in it or they can't do it. The technique involves a philosophical-psychological examination of the political and emotional content of what's going on; an intimate emotional response; Stanislavsky is not enough.

The technique of the radical theater is in your commitment and your understanding of the political nature of reality. With Schumann, I see very heavy pacifist, very religious-mystical stuff. Some of it I don't agree with. I don't believe I'm a pacifist anymore, I don't know if I ever was. Last night's performance [of "Reiteration—which Schumann describes as "a longish production based on 'A Man Says Good-bye To His Mother' " which is a street play, referred to later on] was not pacifist. It was much stronger, but I don't know if Schumann believes in the Viet Cong defense of their own country as an absolute necessity.

I think where we'd have to deal, sometime, is "do you believe war is bad per

se?" Or do you understand that national liberation wars are absolutely necessary—that revolutions in countries dominated by American imperialism are the only way to get free of American imperialism. Pacifism does not work in Vietnam, it's been tried by the Buddhists and it's a wonderful thing, but it doesn't stop American bombers and it doesn't stop American guns and it doesn't stop American defoliation. The Vietnamese have no way of talking to the American GI or the American government and saying: "look, it's our country, we're good people, why don't you leave us alone?" They haven't, they won't, and they are not going to.

Schumann's beautiful, strong images, his very deep commitment, seems a religious commitment—which is something I don't have and Mime Troupe people do not tangibly know of—or know of but haven't faced. We talk about television, and rock bands and the plastic world, we deal with it. We're middle class people, Mime Troupe middle class people. We have to get it out of our systems, but it's very hard because we've all lived with it. Schumann brings just a whole different beautiful thing. The time is much different. People don't like to go through that time. I'm committed to that time because I know something about him and about the people. I like that torture, if it's torture. Bread and Puppet's time space is very different, it's sculptured time; quite different from commercial theater, from the Mime Troupe or Teatro or most people's theater.

In Teatro Campesino, there's a social time difference—very immediate, very now, emotional Mexican-American time. The songs are rapid. The language rapid. Closer to the American disease, which is speed, speed, speed, speed (and will kill and does). But we're in it and I don't think you can avoid it when you deal with American stuff.

Americans are so fucking hip. Middle class kids understand everything quick, but nothing below that. The hip generation (and I'm part of it), everybody understands, like, dig that! Absolutely! Yeah! But ask them about what's really going on underneath and they have no knowledge. Everybody's so freaking television hip, so fast, that they're impatient with Schumann's time, which is absolutely necessary. Because sometime or other, you have to sit down and say where you are. And I don't mean Zen, and I don't mean Buddhism, and I don't necessarily mean religion. Maybe religion is the only place where you can stop and think, but sooner or later everybody has to do that.

Teatro's time is more like our time and Luis is more theatrical than sculptural. Luis himself, as a performer, is fantastic. You watch him closely, he's really a great mime and that's why we're going to offer him a job, get him to give up this other stuff!!

SVENDSEN: Let me ask Luis Valdez to speak of both troupes.

VALDEZ: A starting point, perhaps. Four years ago I was in San Jose shortly after my first play was produced—"The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa." I

walked out in the street and there was the San Francisco Mime Troupe. I'd been searching for something with the play, with my whole life as a Chicano, farmworker, city boy also, and never caught up with it. I couldn't find it in academic theater. Professional theater was just totally out of range because you can't find that in the Valley or in the colleges. I knew it was there, but I'd never found it. So I walked out into that street that afternoon and there was the S. F. Mime Troupe and it was fantastic: the light, the color, the sound.

The sound is very important. He talked about our speed. I think the most important thing is noise, our noise, we like to make noise. That's because this society doesn't allow Mexicans to make noise. We're supposed to get off the streets, and stay at la cantinas and keep our mouths shut. You know, it's not like Mexico; you don't have guys hawking tacos and tamales and even pepsicola on the corners. You don't do that, not in this country. There are laws, there are streets, there are sidewalks. SHUTUP, learn English. You can't serenade or they'll come and bust you. You can't come out with a corrido, you can't go "Ay, yai, yai, YAI!" You can't.

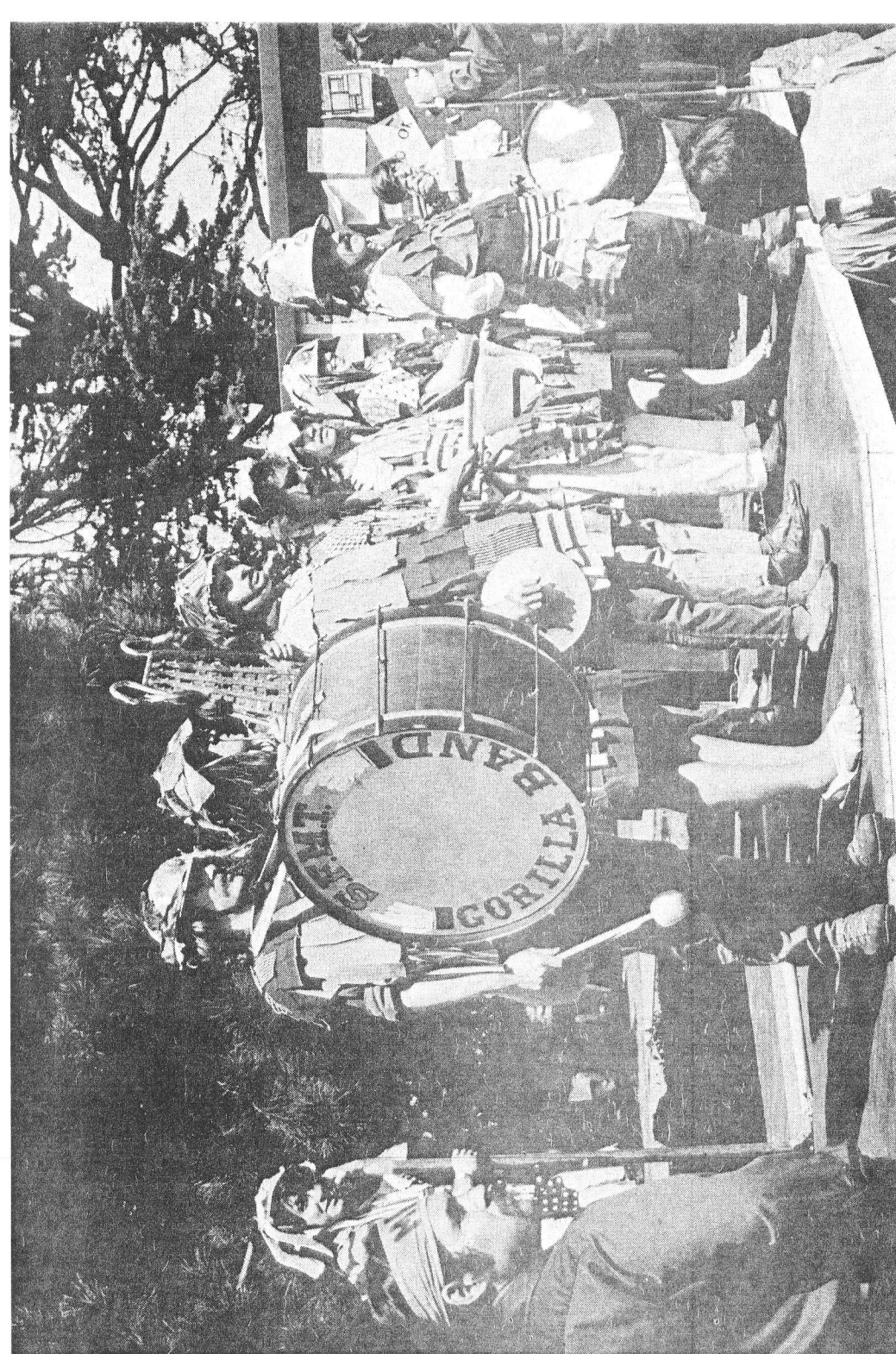
So that's what our theater is doing. There are no "Ay, yai, yai's" in academic theater. I ran into a few Mexicans—Tennessee Williams' racist stereotypes, Eugene O'Neill is worse, you know. There ain't anybody, nobody. I was looking for a theater that expressed something. And what came the closest to my feeling was commedia, and that was the Mime Troupe.

So I came to San Francisco and joined the Mime Troupe. There was obviously something happening, a fantastic difference from all that bullshit in the academic theater about scenery and lighting. You have to be surrounded by a blockhouse to do conventional theater, that little thing in space, to say your lines, if it won't work out right. And it doesn't get across the seats to the audience anyway. Who responds to Tennessee Williams or Arthur Miller picking his liver apart? You can't respond to that shit. The Mime Troupe is outside, in the park. They're out, they're alive. They draw your attention in spite of all those urban distractions—pedestrians, traffic, etc. They say "fuck the distractions, I've got something to say and you pay attention to it because it's said well."

I sometimes think the best propaganda comes through and is merged with the best art. In the theater, art is communication and propaganda; but organizing and politics and teaching are nothing but that, communication. So the more artful you are, not arty, artful, the more propagandistic you are.

I think the Mime Troupe is trying to reach a different group than we're trying to reach. They have a much more sophisticated approach. They intellectualize and sometimes it goes over the heads of people. As Ron was saying, the hip people say, "yeah, we understand." But they don't really. So the question is how to really communicate these ideas. Our bag in Teatro isn't nearly as sophisticated. We stick to one, two, three, that equals six.

Bread and Puppet: that too, is a cultural shock. It works with reality on two levels, neither of which is even vaguely like the "realistic" theater. I first saw them



at the Newport Folk Festival. The puppets to begin with; those huge, fantastic puppets. The production was "Chicken Little." Peter took theatrical realism and blew it apart and said, people have different visions; people are something else; people can be fifty feet high. There are other forces working in the universe besides this realistic shit. Life goes beyond that, it's much more mystical; it's much more magical; it's more acid-like. And these huge figures come in at the beginning and the Mother Earth figure started creating all these creatures; they come out from under her skirt. She laid an egg and out came a creature with a bill and a funny looking face. All different forms of creation. Beautiful image. Yes, and the kid, six years old I think with a papier mache head. He was a cop. A cop running around with a club hitting everybody. Three feet high, a cop. What really got to me in "A Man Says Goodbye To His Mother" was the use of the airplane and the little paper house. Again, that took the realistic perspective and blew it all to hell. From the infinite to the infinitesimal, you see. It was a little wooden airplane, but it got the point across so strongly because the little kid that plays becomes the pilot that's dropping all those bombs. And there's tremendous truth in that.

The Mime Troupe does it by using the body in beautiful contortions, that's mime: body movement, a tremendous sense of timing. They fill the stage with action and human forms in constant motion—or frozen when it's necessary.

I don't think they know what the fuck they're doing in academic theater or in professional theater, really. And that's because nobody knows what the fuck they're doing in this country.

All of a sudden, you see with clarity, and you say, you don't need all that shit! You don't need a hundred thousand dollars to start a theater group. You can do it with nothing, nothing. Do a play about naked people. That's it. The theater is in you. It's your soul, it's your heart, it's the constant reaffirmation of what life is all about.

The society strays away from all this. It seems to reach peaks. Where the society is expressive of life, it really bustles. I suppose capitalism was expressive of the utmost of life at one historical point. It's no longer that way. Now perhaps socialism can be the most expressive form of what life is all about. And after that it will be some other ism, perhaps. I don't know, man will invent a name. There are dead things in this society, they're dying all around us all the time. Shells from the past, bits and pieces that just cling. Some people still live in 1920, they still think Eugene O'Neill's "Emperor Jones" is a really fantastic play. But it isn't it's a racist play.

I can't name plays about Mexicans, because there aren't any. But we dig what the Bread and Puppet Theater is doing. We dig what the Mime Troupe is doing. In our own work we're utilizing everything that theater has given us, everything we've got. We are working with a certain reality, but it's always tempered by a need to say something. The Mime Troupe has a need to say something, and this shapes what they do. And there's obviously something that matters very much to the Bread and Puppet theater; and this, ultimately, shapes what they do.

That's the most important thing. You've got to have something to say or get off the fucking stage.

SVENDSEN: How about you Peter? If you could comment on how you see the other groups, then we could go on to the next thing: how you want to be seen and what you want to do.

SCHUMANN: The best way for me to start talking about the Mime Troupe or Campesino is by responding to the things they've said or contrasting what we do to the Mime Troupe or Campesino.

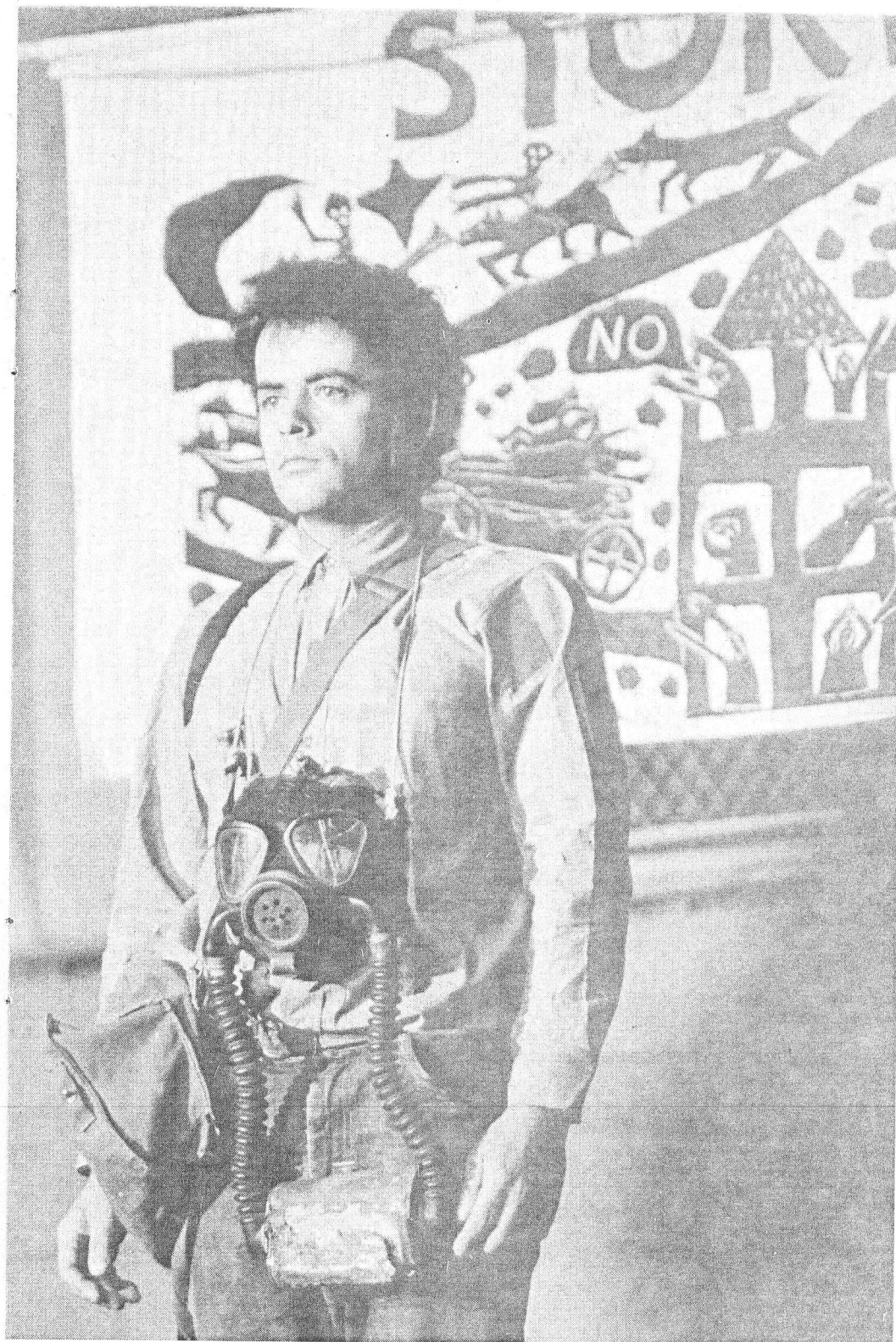
What Ronny said is true: our play is an anti-play, a performance which is not really a performance. The Mime Troupe and Campesino have a lot of theatricality, and this is their work. In that is their message, and in that is their love. With us it is certainly not so, the play usually grows out of a workshop: after working with people for a time you get to the point where you put it together and you put it in front of people. Like our play "Reiteration" was a response to a task; it is based on a play we were asked to do on a street corner in East Harlem. They needed this play within two days. We didn't have anything. We did a rehearsal and there happened to be this little airplane and a baby doll in the studio, and I think that is how the play came together. It was very accidental and it was also because of the task: we were forced to do something in two days that could be done with four players on the street corner and could be carried very easily, and they didn't have money for it either.

But, then, for us that's the whole difference. We don't have this big interest in theater, like Ronny has and like Luis has. Most of the people in the company are not actors or mimes. Most come for political reasons. We actually have a hard time with actors, when we do get actors into plays.

But it's valid for an actor to learn these things to a degree. What Ronny calls a-theatrical or anti-theatrical stuff, like standing on stage and trying to get beyond what you act. To try to stay there and say something like you would to Uncle Joe.

What do I feel unifies different theaters like ours? (By the way, I don't particularly like the term radical theater. I feel it's a qualitative term which doesn't apply to us, too much.) But we all feel theater has to have something as simple as a purpose, you see. It shouldn't just be because somebody likes to do it, or because they were sent to acting school. Compare this with a painter who feels he doesn't have to sit and paint what he wants, but paints for the purpose of bringing it somewhere. And this means he also decides where to carry it and whom he shows it to. This is what the three companies here are very much concerned with. And we want our show to serve that simple purpose: to speak about an issue to somebody, to an audience.

DAVIS: Why do you talk about "story"? You once said you didn't like "L'Amant Militaire" because it drove message in a heavy-handed way and you like stories laid out, like "Rinaldini"—that's an example of the "cranky" you've done which is a story. It's different from a play.



SCHUMANN: Yeah, that's right.

SVENDSEN: Why do you call it story?

SCHUMANN: Because it is nothing but that.

DAVIS: Where does it go? What do we do with it?

SCHUMANN: That's a good question. I don't know.

SVENDSEN: How do you see your way of bringing the story across that is different from the Mime Troupe's way?

SCHUMANN: The Mime Troupe obviously has the stress on play. It brings the story across by doing a lot of things with it. And we do it the other way around: take everything out and leave just this little bit which is the story.

DAVIS: Do you think this story communicates enough without the play?

SCHUMANN: Yes, I guess so. But, that's our limitation. We are just not enough of the theater to feel we could do more than the story itself and a few lines. In "Reiteration": at first we had other lines in, like we had her spilling the soup, and the airplane bombing the soup, and stuff like that. The play had a little too much sidetrack. And we had to cut it out. It didn't work any more; it was getting phony, it was getting picturesque. All the work was constantly trying to get away from the story. So we threw it all out again and ended with just these particular lines.

DAVIS: Do you think you could come in with another group and teach them to do that play?

SCHUMANN: Yes. We did it just a little while ago with high school kids. We gave the play to them and just gave them instructions and they directed it. They made a funny play. But it was beautiful. The kids really wanted to say this thing. They played it for their fellow students. The narrator was a girl and she was very emotional on every line: "AND THE MAN NEEDED A GUN" she said, "AND HE NEEDED A GAS MASK." But it was terrific.

SVENDSEN: I think Ronny is pressing about the story to find out if it is a limitation or an end result. I think the question comes from the situation—in the theater particularly—of not knowing what stories to tell. Going further: when you don't know what stories to tell, you also don't know what to do outside of the theater.

SCHUMANN: That's true. I think the trouble with legitimate theater or academic

theater and so on is that they don't have a story. Basically that's it. If you look at a good American puppet show, with all its fancy puppets and all that, there's only one thing missing. It has nothing to tell. The puppets do all kinds of tricky things, but there's no story that's worth telling. And most of the modern theater I have seen doesn't have a story, a legend, a story.

You know, that's what makes a picture good, it makes a piece of music good. The purpose, the fullness of the story, the thing that tells it to the other guy. You call it fable. The history of our country consists of digging old fables out, dressing them up again. Most of the stories in the world usually are very similar. There's a constant flow of a few basic stories going through the drama departments at all times. But there's always something new coming into these old stories.

VALDEZ: Are you consciously trying for an intellectual or an emotional response in "Reiteration"?

SCHUMANN: It would be unfair of me to answer that because we didn't think that way. We didn't think, "what do we want to achieve in this story?" except at first when we wanted to be on an East Harlem street corner and say to these mothers, some of whom we knew had received that little letter: "Here. Hear this. Here's your letter." That was the reality of this play. The letter is the first sign you get when they kill your son. Our message was to put that letter into a context that was well-known to them, to say it in a way which they probably were not used to themselves.

SVENDSEN: I was particularly impressed with your way of doing theater with silence. Would you comment on the Teatro Campesino and its noise, particularly in respect to your kind of silence, your kind of time — and could you also comment on the social aspects of that?

SCHUMANN: I actually agree 100% with what both Ronny and Luis said about noise. They can not drop out of this noise that is already here, in this civilization and in our cities. Instead of deserting it, we should use it, do something with it; respond to it by making more noise or by loving it and finding that in it which is pure noise.

DAVIS: But we're talking about a different noise. Luis is talking about gritos, which is a human noise; you're talking about a band, man-made instruments making noise. We're talking about singing songs. That's different from machinery



El Teatro Campesino singing

or air things. It's become mechanical and electronic. And I think that the unity of that is human sound, human-created sound, guitar sound.

SCHUMANN: But the response, that is the same thing still. Because the guy who wants to talk with all this noise has to scream. In the street if you want to be heard you have to use this loud shouting.

VALDEZ: Well, I think your images scream. They don't make any noise, but they scream, sometimes.

SCHUMANN: No, I wanted to say about this . . . take rock and roll, isn't that . . .

SVENDSEN: That's noise . . .

SCHUMANN: That's noise.

DAVIS: Don't put it down or we'll get wiped out . . .

SVENDSEN: Ah, but why do you go to silence?

SCHUMANN: I don't know. Probably partly because, as Ronny says, I'm a sculptor and it's just my personal gear to do it that way. But I also feel this is a



Bread and Puppet Theater music

great means to work with—to not use noise. Also it's not quite fair to judge all our things by that criticism because we do have very jumpy and loud and noisy stuff.

DAVIS: But your timing is much different than ours.

SVENDSEN: In a way, you're sculptural to the extent that your means are sculptural—people and objects. But your method is musical, and that then becomes still more contradictory. Why do you use silence when you're a musician as well? I suspect that you are an alchemist and a magician, not a revolutionary; a Paracelsus. So why the silence too when your method is musical, baroque?

SCHUMANN: That's true. The first play is a piece of baroque music, a concerto. Its message is partly to be a piece of music like that, if you would just listen to it and not look at it. I guess you would get as much of the message as when you look at it. Because it is a musical composition with these few musical means, a tiny little tune; the silences and a few lines.

DAVIS: One problem about your stuff when it goes into the theater and commercial critics look at it is that they can't understand it because their eyes and their ears are in tune to bang, bang, bang. And they can't stop. Even the guys from the Village Voice. The complaint is that your time is too long. Your time is too long indoors, because they are used to superficial time. It should be

imperative that your shows not be done in a theater, because it's anti-theater. It's sort of hard to be anti-theater in a theater. It becomes sort of pretentious, avant-garde—and you're not avant-garde. In a gym, like last night, it seemed to be appropriate. It was essential that it be there. You create the space. Time can be allowed to take its course, if the surroundings will allow that. Like, if there's a building behind you that's been up for two hundred years it's evident that you can take a little time. But if the building was just put up yesterday, and it's got pre-fabricated plastic all over it, you've got to speed up.

SVENDSEN: In what social space do you think you should be performing ideally?

SCHUMANN: In gyms. I agree.

SVENDSEN: You admit everything and deny nothing, right? Silence, silence is big.

SCHUMANN: The gym is a good spot. We don't really like to play in theaters. For one thing, I really feel a theater is a misconstruction in itself. To have a place that's there and all the things are set already; the whole big machinery! If I would go into a theater, I would love to do a light show. All the lights are there and all these technicians. If we would, as Ronny says, take over Broadway, then I think we would have to do light shows and shows with garbage and paper. All those people are to clean the floors and it would be a great show just to work with them, cleaning up the floors. It is all unused material. It's all there for nothing. And so to create these things, you see, that's theater. To do something to the space and not just assume, "I'm here" . . . these are the means, and then we do something with them.

VALDEZ: I'd like to add that you have to touch them where they are. Our way of working is to incite people, to say "go on, do it, it's easy. Go on, everyone, let's go!" And before you know it, everybody's getting up, "What, what?" And you're all out the door. We put a flag up there and you follow the flag, right? That kind of thing—in fact, set up a whirlwind . . .

SCHUMANN: That's exactly how I would describe what you do.

VALDEZ: But you have to engage people and say, "Okay, this is what we want to do." Our whole thing is that we want to do something after this thing is through in the theater. It's not the theater; it's on the flatbed truck, the hall, the street, wherever. After, something has to happen. What now?

SCHUMANN: But isn't that the same hang-up we have in giving messages through theater? Instead of going a step further and getting the election booth

turned around or whatever, we go out and do another message; do another play or play it again, instead of taking action. I mean, we have the same trouble as the audience we might blame for not picking up the axe or the shovel or whatever after the show . . .

VALDEZ: We never blame the audience.

SCHUMANN: I mean, these are two very similar hang-ups.

DAVIS: I think inciting has to be looked at in many different ways. It seems to me you are working with three levels in radical theater. One, you play in a commercial way. They like you because you are a bunch of freaks or you're ethnic, or you're dirty, or you're religious, or you're different. They like you that way. That's the superficial way. An audience which appreciates you sees some difference between you and the commercial theater, that's one kind of audience. There's another kind of audience, they are very much like you and really want to do what you're doing and live as you do. That's the movement or the people who are not plastic. But the most difficult area is in our own companies. Radicalizing, intelligently training our own members so the companies themselves do what we call great theater and are dedicated to the same kinds of images.

You can incite people in many different ways. Certainly, people are incited by the way Teatro does it. And, certainly, in another way, people are moved by the way Peter does it. One night people would be incited to go and smash windows. Another night they should come back and see Peter's thing and figure out why they smashed the windows, and why we are living here, and why we are. There is too much pointless radical behavior. SDS on campus: "Let's run out there, let's do it! Registration lines—we got to destroy registration lines! We go do it!" And people say, "well, why are you doing it?" "Well, we're doing it, because we've got to do it. Let's go out there! Get the flags!" Boom! You get there and you don't know why you're there. This is a problem of radical behavior. There's a lot of sound and not enough reasonable alternative.

I think we react too automatically. We're essentially talking about an affirmative life. We want to make a lot of noise of our own. And we don't want to be told, "You're not making it well, you're not doing it well." Although we should do it well, we want to make our own noise."

VALDEZ: You know the two noises that we have in "Pancho Villa"? We have two very loud farts.

DAVIS: How do you train to do a fart?

VALDEZ: You know, it's an art.

SVENDSEN: One thing that has impressed me about the radical theaters is that

radicalization begins in the troupes themselves. There should be no difficulty in defining radical theater: it's less what it says than what it does, above all what it does in its own group.

DAVIS: More often than not, when we come to a problem we deal with it in an intellectual way. The people in the shows are more radicalized than the people watching. Individuals ask, "Why do you play for people who agree with you?" and I say, "They don't, because, hopefully, we're ahead of the audiences that think we're radical or liberal."

The job of the artist in politics is to take leaps the politicians never take. At this point I find myself trying to refuse to go to demonstrations against various and sundry people. We refused to go to Chicago, on the basis: wasn't Whitehall a failure in New York? Didn't the Pentagon demonstration prove it was ridiculous to stand out and get bashed around by cops?

In terms of political activity, demonstrations and protests, for me, are ended. I've always said to myself that if the protest is more important than what we do in the theater, then we should go to the protest. That means we must do something very significant. Conversely, if we are going to rehearse while they're getting shot on the streets, our show better be very, very significant and it better establish an absolute alternative.

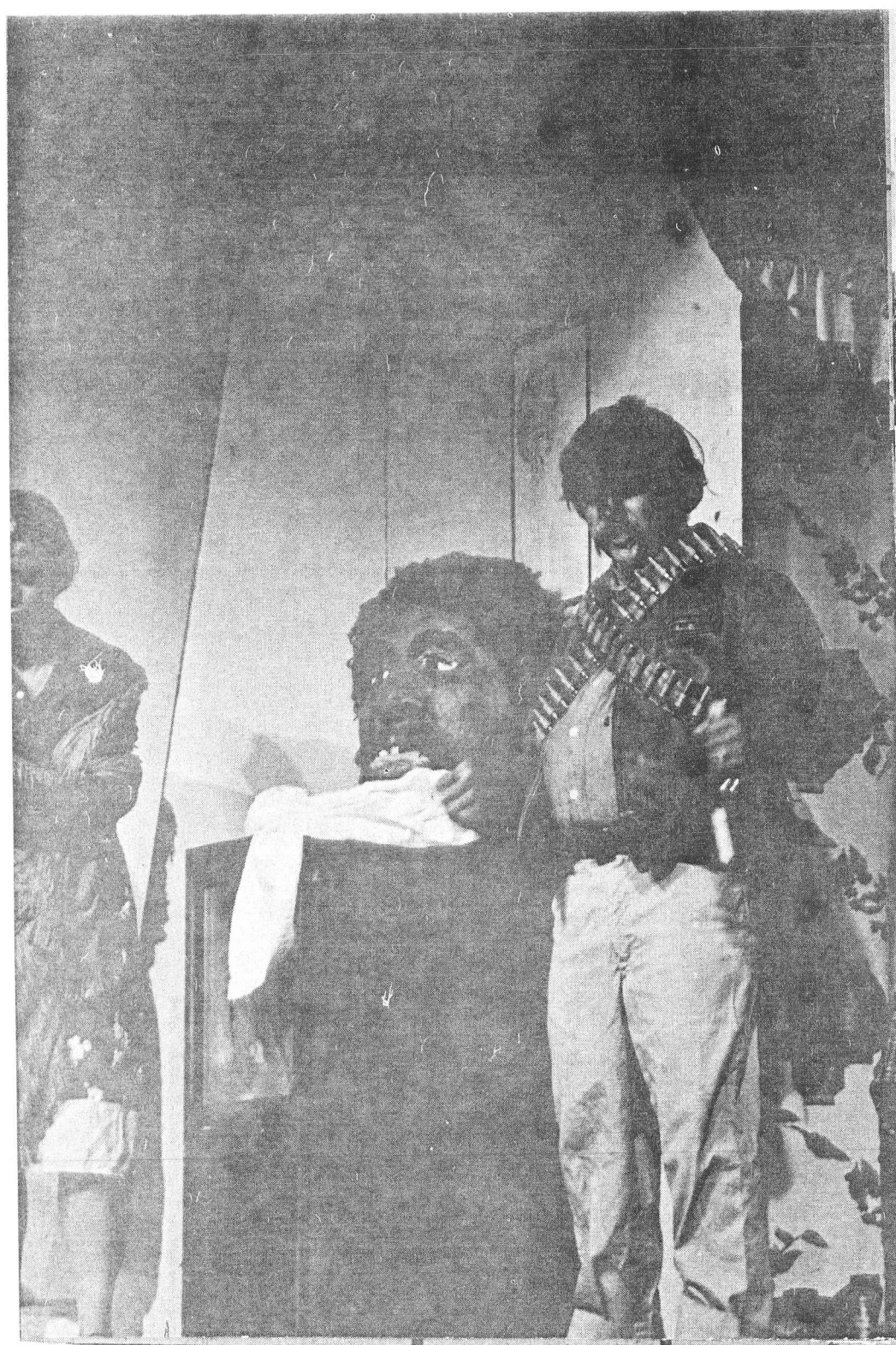
We get calls: "There's a big demonstration, three guys are going to get jailed now. Would you come down and play your music or band and tell us something? Please?" And you're in the middle of rehearsal, with a show opening the next night, and you have to decide at that particular moment. Should we quit and go there and risk tomorrow, or should we stay here and complete what we have to do?

I think at this point, the radical theaters are required to do what they have to do in a magnificent and significant way, creating that alternative and telling the politicians it's not enough to protest and show the contradictions of the society. I think everybody knows that. They don't know what you do as an alternative. We all know Teatro exists, the Mime Troupe exists and Bread and Puppet exists. So when someone says, "Where, what theater do I go to?" you can say, go to one of these three or create your own. That's an alternative. Rather than saying, "Broadway is shit, off-Broadway is shit, academic is shit. We all know it's shit, but I work in it anyway and I get my \$185 a week and I'm joining Equity. I'll be in Hollywood next year." Garbage.

The alternative is imperative. I find myself talking about a ten-year plan in the Mime Troupe which is very difficult. Frightening. But the responsibility is to create that alternative, permanent radical guerilla theater. I guess that is a contradiction. But if you think of yourself as revolutionary and not radical, you think of yourself as winning. Winning in theatrical terms: the Teatro would survive for ten years and grow. The Mime Troupe would survive for ten years and grow. The Bread and Puppet would survive for ten years and grow. Then there



S. F. Mime Troupe, "The Farce of Patelin"



will be three other Chicano theaters, and two other Mime Troupes and three other Bread and Puppets. And in ten years we can look around and see that we could undermine the monstrosity of America.

SVENDSEN: The third and last question I would like the panelists to consider is what do you do now? Where do you go from here?

VALDEZ: Where we go is in a sense tied up with where our audience goes, and where the movement goes. We're trying to survive. That's the most important thing, to keep on going. What does it mean to be a radical theater and what relationship do you have to the movement? Teatro emerged from the movement. We were so close to the movement, as a matter of fact, that it kept destroying us from time to time. The strike in Delano is a beautiful cause, but it won't leave you alone. A cause is a living, breathing, thing. It's more important to go to the picket line and leave a rehearsal. So we found that we had to back away from Delano, sixty miles at least, to be a theater. That was a very hard decision to make—very, very hard. Do you serve the movement by being just kind of half-assed, getting together whenever there's a chance, hitting and missing, or do you really hone your theater down into an effective weapon? Is it possible to make it an effective weapon without being blood-close to the movement? That's the question that was on our minds and what we took on when we moved sixty miles to Del Rey.

There's something else. The Chicano movement—it's in the cities, the farms, everywhere. It involves all kinds of themes, all kinds of movements. I think eventually Mexicans in the Southwest will identify closely with Latin America. The Chicanos are going through many different phases right now, and I think that as we express ourselves to our own people, we'll go through certain artistic phases, propaganda phases, and we'll grow. There's all kinds of room. We have to make films, publish our own books. There's not one single novel that's worth anything. Not one single play by a Mexican or so-called Mexican-American has been published in this country. Not one! There are no movies, no TV programs.

You see, we have this enormous problem—a cultural problem, I was almost going to say, except it isn't. The culture lives, it survives. It just hasn't been expressed in ways this country is used to seeing. But the people in the barrio dig it. Our work involves translating cultural pride into political action.

SVENDSEN: How about you, Peter? Where do you go?

SCHUMANN: We haven't decided yet, like Ronny, that we are finished with the demonstrations. I mean, it's a constant confusion—for everybody—do you skip a rehearsal and working on what you want to do or do you go and do something for a particular purpose? We do this less than we did a year or two ago. We prefer, more and more, to say no and work on the things we really want to say. But the confusion still exists, because things come up that you feel you can help by being there—by bringing puppets or a little skit.

A few years ago, we did huge parades down Fifth Avenue. We asked the Parade Committee; we did them. We don't do that anymore. We simply feel New York has seen this and they saw it, and the movement grew. Now, something else has to come. But whatever comes, it will be a response to what happens politically in the world. We have not decided what we will do, but it will be in response to politics in our neighborhood, where we live and in response to the larger American scene. One thing that goes on, as Ronny said, is simply the outgrowth into other groups. What other people take from you, or what you can initiate with other people. Five years ago, when we started playing in the street, it was new to New Yorkers. They hadn't had that since the twenties. Now I think there are about five street theaters in New York.

DAVIS: That's about what happened to us: eight years ago, when we started in the parks, there was no one and now there are rock bands in the street and puppet plays and all kinds of things. The same thing happened with Teatro: four years ago no Teatro; now there's a Teatro Urbano, Teatro Chicano. We do stimulate that kind of alternative.

One thing about political demonstrations. In a sense, in a good way, the agitprop groups are replacing us and should do that. The agitprop groups are not actors, not permanent. They want to do one thing at the particular moment. People who are radical and people who do not necessarily want to commit themselves to acting or the theater for a long time, should do those things. They're beautiful. The agitprop groups are now around to say—visually and dramatically—something about the issues at hand. I think the next step for us is to really get down to creating organizations committed to a 10 year thing with people who are concerned with the details of administration.

To put it in revolutionary terms, the revolution in Cuba was based upon tomatoes, tomatoes, not on Debray's idea, and producing tomatoes for people to eat is the revolution. And a play is the result of diligent, inch-by-inch bloody work. Playtime is over if you commit yourself to any one of these groups. It's enormously difficult. But discipline, the efficiency and administration and all that stuff is absolutely necessary to achieve everything. If you don't want to do anything, you can split, and do your own thing yourself. But if you care to do something with others, the efficiency and discipline are absolutely important. I think our motivations are clear, and will be clarified. Not that we have an absolute program, but what we are about is absolutely valuable. We will still grow, but getting it done is very difficult and needs enormous discipline.

SVENDSEN: In other words, the only good guerilla is a live guerilla. You need discipline to remain alive.

Now to some questions from the people around us.

QUESTIONER: For the past five years I've been working in Toronto with a group—it started off a very political theater, very much in the streets and parks,

and has progressed into a fully professional theater with discipline, like the organization of which Ronny speaks. I'm afraid that when you divorce yourself, perhaps, from the demonstration, you have to be awfully careful that you're not losing touch with people. Have you, gentlemen, a solution for staying in close contact with the people, so you don't gradually, through your efficiency, through your discipline, through your organization, go further and further away from the people, where I think theater is at?

DAVIS: The whole basis of what we're talking about is so different than the commercial end that we don't have that problem. If you do a show in the park, you're immediately into people. You can get magnificent reviews in the London Times or in New York and when you go to the Mission district and say, "Here we are with the show," they say "Let's see it." Period. As long as you keep that reality in front of you, you're always relating to the movement.

Also I think that we're committed to the ideas of the movement, so we won't maybe, get disconnected from it. We'll get disconnected from parts of the movement, but I think that there are enough people *inside* each company to straighten this out. The key is that the organizations are *designed* differently than commercial theaters. It's true that when you get into *bureaucratic* structure you have problems, but bureaucratic structure exists in Cuba, in China. How do you beat it? That's a legitimate question. But you can certainly straighten yourself out by going into the street one day and seeing that nobody gives a shit where you've been, just do a good show.

QUESTIONER: To summarize: take the theater to the people rather than try anything else.

DAVIS: I think that will always keep us straight.

VALDEZ: There's something else, too, dramatically. No matter what you do on stage, you have to remain in contact with the people. Our work would not be called sophisticated, you know—a lot of people think it's kind of rustic, because it's so simple and straight and obvious. The point is, we can only stay one step ahead of our audience, and it has to be a very easy step for them to make, or they won't make it. If we are a hundred steps ahead of them, they'll never make it. We may be groovy and entertaining, they may see all the movements and the color and banners and music, guitars and all that shit, but it won't do anything for them because it will be just another carnival.

The way to stay with people is in your own knowledge of people. "Pancho Villa" is still evolving in a sense. We're working with little realities, little statements that may not mean anything to you but mean a lot to the people that we're trying to reach. It will grab them because those are their realities. In the commercial theater, someone would come along and say, "Well, why don't you

translate this passage into English, because your audience won't understand you." That's not my audience, man. I'm not writing for Anglos, you know.

The Teatro Campesino is not trying to be the Trini Lopez of the theater. If we use English, we use it for a particular reason because our people do speak English, but they also speak Spanish. And they speak a very particular kind of English and a very particular kind of Spanish. What we're trying to get is a reality; a reality so real that it's way out.

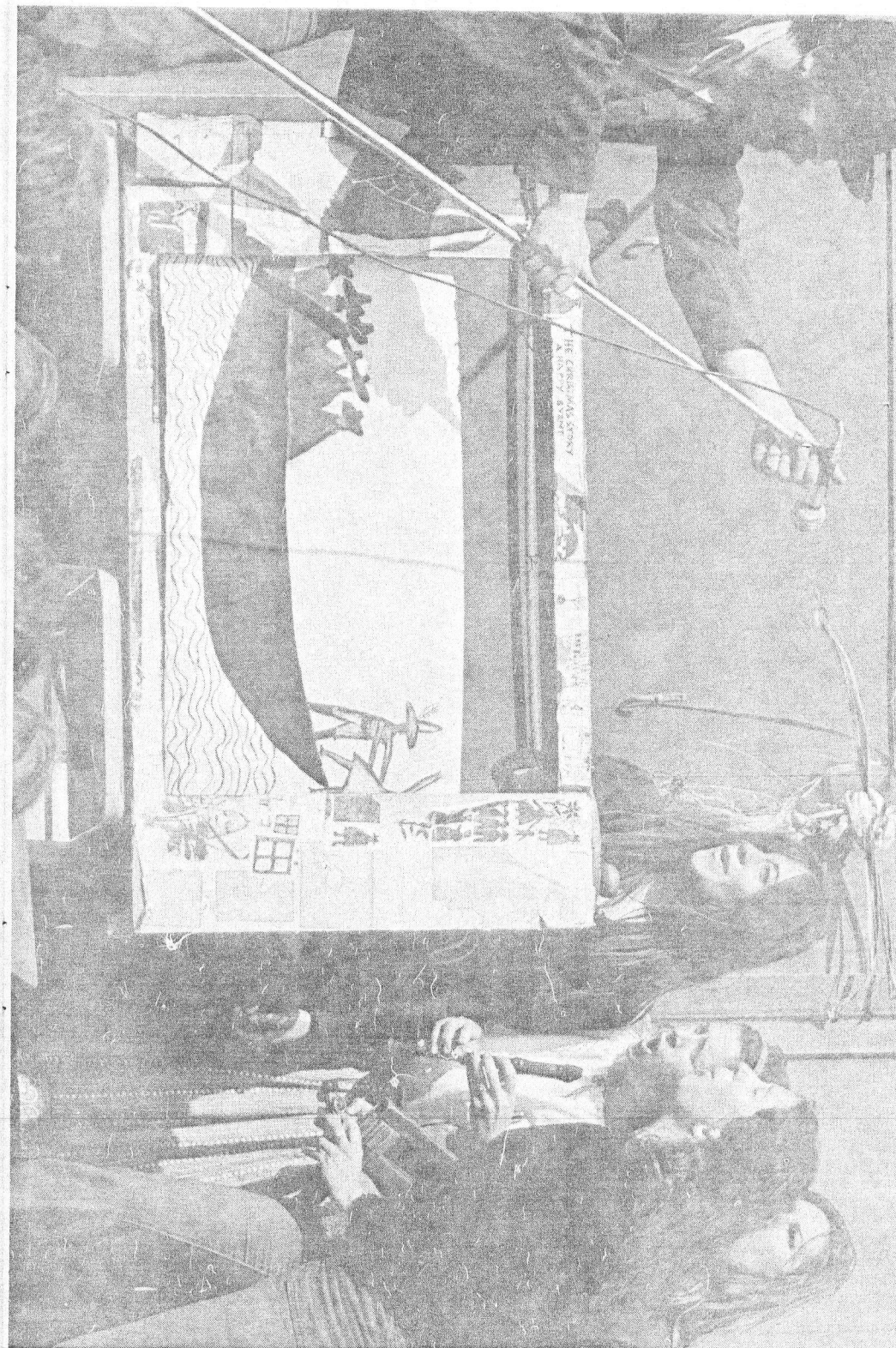
SCHUMANN: I find this problem of losing contact with people very real. Like Luis said, it's an artistic problem. You can separate yourself from people by doing something too much inside itself and then it doesn't talk to anybody. At the Newport Folk Festival last year, when Luis was there, we sort of succeeded. We did a show that worked on this big stage and for this folkie audience, who wanted to hear beautiful songs. But this year we got completely stuck. We wanted to play the Bible in twenty minutes and we ended up playing nothing but the murder of Cain and Abel in something like ten minutes with these big puppets. It was a show that had nothing to give. It just was in itself. It didn't say anything. It was not even a good show.

At the same time, we felt that for this audience who came there to listen to all the schmaltzy, nice, beautiful singing that went on, it was just the right kind of cold water. It was nice for them to get that and they really thoroughly didn't like it. We felt that was almost an achievement.

DAVIS: I think we have to talk about success. In these kinds of theater success is when we do something right and other people act, something happens to other people. Success is not a good review, but creating other alternatives. Success is in creating more jobs for people, success is adding to the movement's breadth and understanding. You're always connected to the politics and the realities of life, and never separated. I mean, the people in each company will always straighten up the company. I'm sure Luis has as much problem with his people as I have with mine. And Peter gets new people every show. We're always faced with proving ourselves to our own people — you don't get people to work their asses off unless you can prove it. So, you're always straight in that way. No one works at these kinds of theaters because of money, because there's not enough. No one works for stardom, because there's no stardom. There's a great deal of anonymity. And you either work for the purpose of it or you don't work in it.

SCHUMANN: That's the life saver, you know. That you constantly have to prove yourself to the people that you work with and that there is a constant necessity of existence. You couldn't do it if you couldn't convince the people you are working with. And you can only play what you can convince everybody of.

SVENDSEN: I think success or failure is not a question. It's not that much of a problem. You continue and when you make success a problem or allow it to be





one, then you're back where you began: namely, that's why you started in the first place. But you constantly have to ask that question, and that kind of reply gives you comfort to continue. Next question.

QUESTIONER: You talk a lot about attacking academic theater and professional Broadway theater. Have you ever, specifically, in any of your acting skits, attacked their form of theater?

SVENDSEN: I suspect the answer is that their existence is already threatened.

DAVIS: There's no sense attacking a dead horse.

VALDEZ: I'd have to go too far in New York to find a tortilla you know.

QUESTIONER: Did you say you're getting to the point where you have to divorce yourself from the movement?

DAVIS: No, I didn't say divorce myself. We ought to take ourselves seriously as artists and make sure our art is as creative as Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver. If I can say my work is as important as theirs, then I do it. If I can't then I should join them or get guns for them. That's why we are divorced from simpleminded, run-around political activity. I think there's a lot of that. I don't want to put it down, and say we have grown up and we know more and kids who got bashed up in Chicago are wrong. I think they are, but I still feel for it, I hate the fucking Democratic convention and all the police, but I don't have time to go. You may have time to go and you should go and do what you can.

I do think we have to prove ourselves and make what we have to do really essential. When you come back home, you need us. There are some people who make the soup and some people who shoot the gun. And some people read the books and some people do the plays. There's a tech man putting the lights on and he is as important, when you need the lights, as the actors who are supposed to say the words. You need all those people to do it.

QUESTIONER: You say you want to incite people in this new theater you've created, but do the people really get incited or do they just come away having a better understanding of the problems that you have presented?

DAVIS: The Mime Troupe has that danger. We're doing puppet plays now where we're trying to tell people to do something. Take a tab top and put it in a parking meter and you get 40 minutes free time, that's very concrete. When Luis talks about inciting, he's talking to farm workers. Now he's done shows on the back of trucks or on the streets with pickets and there were scabs in the field while he's doing a show. He says, "Why are you doing that?" I'm sure he can tell you incidents where they stopped work and walked out.

VALDEZ: We've also had the opposite response. Where we've played the enemy so much that they come at us. One guy showed up at the center one night; he was drunk and he had a knife. He calls me out and he says, "What are you insulting me for?" And I said, "What, it's just a skit about a sell-out Mexican-American." And he said, "Well, I'm not a sell-out." "Well, shit, we didn't even say it was you." That's his problem, not mine. It could have been a full-scale thing.

Right now in Del Rey there is a tremendous movement against us. The John Birch society is distributing copies of "The Grapes" in Spanish, which says that I was trained in Cuba. This may not be particularly exciting, except that a lot of people in the Valley tend to believe it. Some are Vietnam veterans, who want to feel patriotic, and want to shoot themselves a commie. They're also trying to start attacking us on morality. Because we're different. So we've got a real problem. We're a serious threat to somebody. Not up here—up here, we got friends. It's just a snap, we can say whatever we will. Down there, it's something else. We'd better know goddam well what we're doing. We get on a flatbed truck; we can't be up there and just be radical. Shit, we've got to be conservative.

SVENDSEN: I think that answers your question very beautifully. A troupe does not exist just simply as a source of information, or an aesthetic result. You also exist as an object to be destroyed. And then you've really done something.

DAVIS: Everybody always asks, do you think you're going to succeed? Do you think you'll get a lot of people to do it?

Someone's got to throw the first rock and then everybody throws a rock and then everybody says, "I'll kick in a window, too." Mao Tse-Tung said, and I'll quote The Little Red Book, page 640, "the first guy across the river, allows a 100,000 other guys to do it." You just jump in the river, you swim it and there will be 100,000 people to follow you.

SCHUMANN: And you drown.

DAVIS: Then the revolution's over.

SVENDSEN: One tries to cross safely.

DAVIS: Right, you'd better be able to swim or don't jump in the river.

QUESTIONER: You're talking about long term exposure. Now Peter's getting to the children with the puppets, working with them and maybe changing their ideas a little bit. But as much exposure as I've had to Ronny's theater, a lot of it goes over my head and I'm very willing to admit it. If you're thinking of long-term, how are you going to get to the ten-year olds? Who are going to be twenty-year olds, who are going to be our future. How are you going to get to the kids?

VALDEZ: We had a Chicano theater workshop at the beginning of the summer in Del Rey. Different people from San Jose and Los Angeles came down. And Lupe

Saavedra who heads the Chicano Theater had a short story which he made into an "acto." It's about Honky Sam and we performed it out in the park, and the people were there. And then the workshop was over and everybody went home. And we kept on working. One day I walked into where our stage is and there's two little girls from the town there. One is saying, "Yo soy, Honky Sam," and walking around like one of the characters in the play, and they were doing this interchange. I don't know if they understood, but it gets to them. We have teen-agers doing things on their sweat shirts, saying "Viva La Raza," or when they drive down the street and see us, they yell "la raza." One element we've been very careful to get on our side is the "pachuco" element.

DAVIS: Like the bikers.

VALDEZ: That's right, because if it comes to chingazos, it's good, or else they'll destroy you. Because they don't like shit: "Fuck you!" We took a real risk, we put up these murals, beautiful plywood with all the Indian heroes on one side and on the other the female revolutionary figures. We got Pancho Villa, Miguel Zapata, Joaquin Murrieta, Cesar Chavez, Malcolm and Martin Luther King.

DAVIS: Excuse me, where did Malcolm come from in Mexico?

VALDEZ: No, that's the black-brown thing. The only complaint we've had about it is, "Why didn't you put Robert Kennedy up there?"

But the thing is: here are some murals we've taken the time to paint. It's done in enamel, but it's a beautiful job and we were afraid someone would come along and just put a knife to it. So our original plan was to put it on the wall or maybe to put glass over it or have boards that close at night. That's shit. It should be out on the wall. And if anybody puts a knife through it, it's our fault. And we'll just leave it there. So far, nobody's put a knife through it.

DAVIS: I think kids follow adult theater and that's good. If there's a problem about kid's theater, someone should do it. You can't do everything in the world. It would be nice if in five years we had an arm called Children's Theater, sure.

SCHUMANN: Wouldn't it be dubious and strange to play for kids with the backthought now that you want to influence them as the future, as people who are going to elect the next president in I don't know when.

DAVIS: Ten years . . .

SCHUMANN: Well, I think that would be quite horrible. We do another sort of thing with kids and for kids. On the whole, I agree with Ronny: when you do a good show outside, you collect kids as the biggest part of the audience anyway,

any time. When you show is good enough, kids are a good watch dog audience.

QUESTIONER: You maintain that we have alternatives to establishment theater. I agree, but I wonder if you think you can create or offer an alternative to the larger mass of potential radicals who do not see themselves as being involved in theater. In other words, more than just individual action, how do you deal with the problem of creating a movement? How do you get potential radicals involved?

SCHUMANN: We deal with that on our level, which is through theater. I mean, we don't want to tell anybody we solved the problem and that we are the ones. We are not being elected to anything and we don't want to be. We do it this way. Others do it by getting people together to put stamps on envelopes and send the message out. But there are many things to be done. We just say, instead of putting the stamp on the envelope, come and help us do this. As Ronny said, that takes a lot of commitment.

DAVIS: First of all, you find that the good actor on stage in this kind of work will be and has to be a good political head, a good organizer. There is a great lesson to be learned from good political organizers who act as well as from good actors. It may be your medium to operate on stage; however, given the kinds of things we do we often step off stage.

In the Mime Troupe, when you get up on the stage you're saying radical-political, political-radical. You're saying something you were told to say, and you step off the stage and someone says, "What do we do now?" When the actor cannot complete that thought offstage, he's not a good actor, not good enough. There's no question that the mainstay of Teatro Campesino is guys from Delano and Del Rey who make up that whole concept of thought, the political, the artistic stuff. They also could be organizers.

I think you can train people. What we can do in the theater is say we're going to become a revolutionary alternative and talk about taking power. I don't think any radicals at this point want to consider taking power. I would like to consider that. Now everyone will say "Impossible!" But I want to consider taking power in very simple terms. If we are terrific, TIME magazine comes down and says, "We'd like an interview." I'd say "Fuck you TIME magazine." That's power in a small, very minuscule sense: they've got to fill up that magazine which is essentially opposed to everything we're about.

If we start to tumble to those ideas and get people to consider taking power and establishing permanence, then I think we are affecting a lot of other activities. In the Mime Troupe, we have been friendly with most of the radicals in the bay area. And at one time or another, they've been on the stage or we've done things for them: we help them and they help us. And I think it broadens our perspective.

SVENDSEN: One thing that has impressed me about these three groups is the



pride and the confidence and the courage they take in themselves. It may look sometimes like arrogance but if you don't have that, don't even bother to get yourself or others going. You've got to start your work with yourself.

DAVIS: It's like watching Luis perform. When he performs, I'm sure that every Chicano who's ever had any doubts about himself becomes a man, in part, for that minute. That's an enormous help. That really changes things. Bobby Seale is an actor, obviously. When a good guy gets up and doesn't bullshit and really says it, I think that moves people, enormously and it's very important.

QUESTIONER: To whom is your theater directed?

DAVIS: Middle-class whites. We're all middle class whites in our theater.

SCHUMANN: I want to play everywhere, anywhere . . .

DAVIS: He's an internationalist, you see.

SCHUMANN: No, I mean I don't want to play to middle class whites only. We try to play anywhere we can.

VALDEZ: I believe in parallel action, that you can get people going in the same direction. In a sense, ultimate theater for us would be the equivalent of the Indians doing a dramatic wardance around the campfire and then immediately hopping on their horses and going off to war. In the battleground someplace—in the ghetto or what have you—if you could do something. People clap hands, they go through gestures. You're fighting for a cause, you can't do it alone with a head and that's it. Some kind of group reassertion, that's theater. Just like the Farm Workers Union march to Sacramento was theater. Just like the picket line is theater. Like even small pep-up sessions before you do something is theater. Everybody knows the leader; they know they're followers. They've got the relationships straightened out. How good is the theater going to be? If it's good theater, it's going to be a good fight.

SVENDSEN: My concluding remark is that most questions about radical theater are answered before they're put—simply through the existence of the groups already, which is a fantastic achievement. Think about how they exist and why and you'll be answering your own questions and finding your own way of moving.

END

EPILOGUE

I

" . . . when you establish one, you can establish two and then you can get three. One, two, three Vietnams. One, two, three, many radical theaters . . . "

II

The guerrilla theaters that met for this festival refused to be called revolutionary, with both Valdez and Schumann stating explicitly that 'revolutionary' was a qualitative term. How is this to be understood — 'guerrilla' yes, 'revolutionary' no? And how is 'revolutionary' a qualitative term?

First of all the festival was a meeting of artists in the theater, of individuals who had survived as identifiable groups long enough to be called theaters. Each group had an artistic basis established by its founder, each founder had a personalized view of his relationship to society, that is, a political stance. Diverse crafts and persons had been invited and assembled to express this stance.

These groups exist within a basic dialectical formulation: how to achieve artistic identity as a group, and how, as an artistic and social unit of discrete individuals, to understand and effect a common political consciousness and select the means to enact it. The balance of this dialectic differs in each group at present. The list of differences is too long to argue; it is enough to enumerate the variables: degree of artistic control by founding personnel, crafts and talents available, economic requirements of individuals and of the group, sociological location of the group, kind and degree of political awareness of their public, and continuity as a group in the face of external political changes.

Other determinants enter into the dialectic of artistic identity and communality of political goals before their 'revolutionary' identity can be considered, but one thing is clear—regardless of what revolution each group is looking for, they are 'guerrilla' in their very existence as identifiable artistic groups opposed to the prevailing society and its political views.

Now, that is not saying much: every artist is a guerrilla in that, in bourgeois conception, he is always outside of society. The difference here is that the guerrilla identity has all the logistical complexity of a political focus behind it. Yes, any theater could be called guerrilla if the distinction were a matter of economic struggle alone. All theaters have to con, crawl, beg, plead and promise. But the non-revolutionary theater does so to get back into society, and their personnel use one another to crawl or vault back onto the heap.

Revolutionary theaters, on the other hand, are true guerrillas, artistic foci, in that they remain outside to become one with a new society. These guerrilla theaters want to get into a society: one with which they are one, because it is also of their making. To that extent these guerrilla theaters are revolutionary.

How is 'revolutionary' a qualitative term? Members of the groups would, in general, agree on the social and political nature of the society they want. So 'qualitative' does not here refer to the quality of the society they seek or to the revolutionary tactics needed to get there but rather to the condition of each group in the present historical moment.

The groups agree on the inadequacy and unlivability of the present and on what must be commonly achieved, but each sees a qualitative difference in its identity in this transition. If the matter were merely one of simple linear logic, in which each group was the copula between A, the present state, and B, the state to come—they would all be revolutionary.

But the trick to reading one's revolutionary existence is to realize that you change your living present as you work toward the common future. We disagree as much in our reading of the present as in our projection of the future. It is a common observation that we drag our pasts with us and, as adages go, that is right. But the point with theater is that those who participate in it drag with them, and are encumbered by, the ever-living now as they work their way out of it.

To the three groups, 'revolutionary' is indeed a qualitative term because it refers more to their present existence and less to their common tactics or views of the future. The shared goal is plowed back into the everyday, tactics become a matter of daily affairs and not a collective operation to be programmatically pursued by all together. (That is what festivals and conferences are for: to check up on each other's successful means.)

In the end, you must live your own life. Tactics are to be argued and revised, goals to be commonly viewed and changed. Tactics and goals are revolutionary in these theaters, but the quality of what is revolutionary in them now is the separateness of their existence as individual groups.

These groups are guerrilla, that is clear. And if their revolutionary being is not clear in definition, it certainly is in existence. It is only hoped that this will never have to be proven by demonstration: definitions can be argued and revised, existences can only be annihilated.

III

What threatens the existence of these groups? Economics, always. But economics has its irrational side, too. Is the threat of annihilation real, or is it just the

glorious dream of the revolutionary who fails to taste victory? After all, the group would be annihilated, not its members (or are we at the point where we eliminate the artist himself, not just his product?)

Who threatens these guerrilla groups? Let us turn this question around and look at it from the viewpoint of the exterminator: who or what must he eliminate, annihilate? And how is he to do it?

Annihilate (make null and void) the founders and central personnel of the groups, then. "We try in our humble way to destroy the United States of America," R. G. Davis has said through the mass media. How can you attack such humility even when, as exterminator, you know it is an expression of arrogance and, further, that arrogance and humility are the psychological defenses of the revolutionary: arrogance sustains him, humility protects him. Much as you want to punish his arrogance, you are checked by his humility.

Yet you know his humility is fake, his arrogance wrong. Knowing that, you strike at his arrogations, realizing that any act of humility—be it ever so true or successfully false—is an act or state of arrogance. It is his arrogation, then, his acts of being, his public existence—not his private state—that you try to destroy, annihilate, eliminate. What the arrogator, the artist, the guerrilla, thinks of himself: this will be taken care of when you have made his acts null and void. Then will you have annihilated him.

But his acts of arrogance have brought him into a humble existence, with all the grace and horror of any existence. He is spoken of, thought of, known; his existence becomes a truth — certainly a fact. But he is beyond fact to you, the exterminator, he is truth. Born in arrogation, he exists in humility, facing you. The truth is out; you lose the target.

You, the exterminator, find you no longer have a target, an identifiable enemy. You begin to realize that you are out to annihilate (make null and void—like a bad check you've written) yourself, since the guerrilla—person, art and movement—is of your own creation. You bring the artist into existence to compensate for your self-blinding, acquisitive life and you keep his art—product and life—in check by making it a controllable commodity. In the past, you left him no will, only a purpose: to serve your needs. The artist complied. He served. No more.

You, the exterminating society, asked for art, brought it forth, to serve your neglected needs but neglected those who served them. Like the bootblack on a rainy corner, the joy girl in a rancid alley or the call girl at the Waldorf, the artist knows he is among the last. He is glad to know that. It gives him direction: he does not move up, he moves out, over, through. He has become a guerrilla; he

changes your geography—the whole country is his territory. Above all, he occupies regions in the back of your mind and may even take over your body, the last of your territories. But he is not out to give you that pleasure: he took up your challenge to exist, but decided not to be anyone's compensation.

IV

He also refuses to be everybody's revolutionary.

The Radical Theater Conference met on the campus of San Francisco State College in September, 1968. At this writing, February, 1969, that school lies in shambles—a symbol of the bankruptcy of the total government. The administrators move up and down with incestuous power plays; they will never open the school unless it moves 'out' and takes in those who have been excluded from their algebra. Their mathematics has no living numbers. The school was closed before and is closed now. Reforms will not open it.

Is there any connection between the gathering of the guerrilla theaters and the closing of the school? An academic question if there is an answer. Was Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967) responsible for halting de Gaulle's cold war against the USA, and Cohn-Bendit's success in raising a student/worker uprising that brought the French state and economy to a near stand-still in May and June of 1968?

Without attempting any general sociological treatise, we can say yes—but yes only because these theaters, like Godard, have survived and will continue to do so. They have been part of the cause, and they will continue as causes, of revolution — even through the regression of reform. As the society reforms itself to compensate for what it lost through revolutionary crises, the guerrilla adjusts himself as well. Despite apparent reform, society regresses to a more reactionary stance. The guerrilla adjusts, too — to a more sophisticated form of attack, one calculated to expose the reactionary regression, the falsity or inadequacy of reform. The guerrilla realizes his lesson: that he is his own revolution. The radical theaters are their own society. They are beyond revolution. To them, 'revolution' is a topic others discuss. These theaters live out what they have gained.

Is that the death of them? No. And no, they were not responsible for the crises besetting our capitalist societies. They have been asked to be revolutionary and will remain so, no matter how much the society reforms itself.

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